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## Albert Camus' *The Plague* in Twenty-First Century's Pandemic Covid-19- A Reification Model in the Capitalistic World

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## Albert Camus' *The Plague* in Twenty-First Century's Pandemic Covid-19- A Reification Model in the Capitalistic World

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### ABSTRACT

Covid-19 has emerged as the new global pandemic in 2020, engulfing thousands of lives in the capitalistic economic system. Reification, in such a materialistic world, commodifies human beings for possessing use-value. The workers transform themselves into dehumanized labor product of Capitalism as a historical project. The economic loss during the current pandemic has changed the outlook of the global capitalist system. The human beings have transformed into productive devices. Lukacs' *Theory of Reification* has been applied to Albert Camus' *The Plague* (1948) to analyze how the epidemics change human conditions and convert them into lifeless products. Such reification leads to alienation of the human beings. The social, political, religious, and medical references and their applicability in the current world suggest the parallelism and universality of Camus' works, especially in the context of current capitalistic society, under siege of Covid-19. The research is a breakthrough in comprehending Capitalism as historically and materialistically intertwined in the current pandemic world, whereby human beings have lost human traits and become reified models of Capitalism. Now, the urge to reform compels to re-determine the morality of human beings.

**Keywords:** Capitalism, estrangement, The Plague (1948), theory of reification, materialistic model, textual analysis

### Introduction

The current Covid-19 pandemic has affected all spheres of life and caused uncontrollable deaths and unemployment. This study analyzes the crisis of epidemics in the twentieth century's *The Plague* (1948), especially about the twenty-first century Covid-19 pandemic. For this purpose, Lukacs' *Theory of Reification* comprehends its relevance with 2020's pandemic *Covid-19*. Camus narrates the economic problems, materialistic pursuits, the love force, and the dying humanity in his novel to deal with the need for literature to suffice temporal and historical materialism of the twentieth century's regimes in the reified capitalistic world. The current scenario of reification of human beings, their mechanized and nonchalant lifestyle, and productive capabilities need to be dealt with a new lens to suffuse the gap among human relations and make them realize the world's transitory nature.

### ***Significance of the Study***

Covid-19 pandemic, in the parlance of affecting millions of human beings throughout the world, triggers the production of vaccination, sanitizers, and other medical aids amidst deploying commodification pursuits and demand-supply problem in the materialistic world. Nevertheless, Capitalism treats human beings as dehumanized products vilifying the viruses, whereby the pandemics create panic and fear among human beings. Camus presents such a reification problem, where the bourgeoisie class sells or buys workers' use-values as labor products in his novel *The Plague* (1948). The capitalistic problem of dehumanized reification and resultant alienation is dealt with in this research, making the study significant, hitherto, questioning the dehumanized world, proving Camus's work's universality and timeless significance.

### ***Research Question***

- In what ways does *The Plague* (1948) represent the materialistic reification model and bring forth the alienated characters to the twenty-first century's pandemic Covid-19?

### ***Delimitation***

Albert Camus' *The Plague* (1948) has been analyzed using the Lukacs' *Reification* model. The analysis is delimited to the theme of dehumanization of human beings as labor power and the resultant alienation in the capitalistic society as a timeless and universal phenomenon in *The Plague* (1948).

### ***Theoretical Framework and Methodology***

The current research is qualitative and proceeds under the ontological paradigm of literary studies. *As the research method, textual analysis* has provided a systematized and sound method for analyzing the selected novel to create a sense of the world, in Alan McKee's words, within the text (2003: 1).

Amidst the collision of bourgeoisie and proletariats for socialist democracy, the intermittent Capitalism focuses on fetishism and commodification as dehumanizing projects. Though manifesting exploitation of workers' use-value is the capitalistic transformation of human beings into reified commodities, these productive machineries resultantly alienate themselves from their living social relations and religion. Cudon's definition of alienation, as a specific condition of estrangement from worker's nature, surroundings, society, and his labor product (2013: 20), is taken from the Marxist term, "the meaning in which alienation (or estrangement) is the act, through which something or somebody, becomes (or has become) alien (or strange) to something or somebody, else' (in Edwards 1967: 76)" (Khan, 1995: 36). Khan enunciates the key elements of Marx' *Theory of Alienation* as "powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness [using illegal resources], social isolation and cultural estrangement" (Khan, 1995: 24). In religious alienation, the worker who has created the god idol with his own hands has transferred his attributes into that created god. "He has become estranged from his life forces ... and is in touch with himself only in the indirect way of submission to the life frozen in the idols' (Fromm 1961: 44; Khan, 1995: 26).

Marx, in *Capital (Volume I)*, categorizes the capitalistic system of commodity's quantity and quality to make "it a use-value" (1887: 27), which focuses only on the quantitative relation between the things with an exchange value (1887: 27). While ignoring worker's use-value as an evil force, Marx presents the possible materialistic value of the labor, "measured by its duration, and labor time in its turn finds its standard in weeks, days, and hours" (1887: 29). In 'Theses on Feuerbach', Marx writes, 'The essence of man [Feuerbach] was regarded only as "species", as an inner, mute, general character which unites the many individuals only in a general way' (CW v 8). He further remarks, "the philosophers have only interpreted the world, the point is to change it" (Thesis 11) (Wolff, 2017). For Feuerbach, love binds people together in a society and attracts individuals to each other (Callinicos, 2004: 66) necessary to contain reification. Hegel's "abstractly mental labor" (CW iii 333) contradicts Marx' ideas of externalization of activity and objectification, which leads to laborers' reification and alienation from the immediate nature because of subjectification of their self, objectivity of bourgeoisie (Lukacs, 1971: 83) and containment of power to reappropriate the product (Khan, 1995: 39-40).

Extending the idea, Lukacs (1971) discusses the religious alienation and dehumanized reification as an objective truth. The *Theory of Reification* develops the meaning of *The Plague* (1947) and Covid-19 (2019- 2020) in the twenty-first century, where humans detached from religion and their transformation into commodities. He writes, "socialism would after all abolish alienation- but its irreducible presence in class society and above all its basis in philosophy brought it into the vicinity of the 'condition humaine'" (Lukacs, 1971: xxiv), highlighting it as, "only when men's nature is subjugated, deformed and crippled can we speak of an objective societal condition of alienation" (Lukacs, 1971: xxiv). Lukacs expounds that a dehumanized worker becomes a "thing and thus acquires a 'phantom objectivity, an autonomy that seems as strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people'" (Lukacs, 1971: 83). The society then transforms into a group of commodities exchanged with money or the value. The only purpose left of humanity is to create use-value and use it as a means of exchange for the consumption of commodities in the reified world (Lukacs, 1971: 84).

According to Lukacs, it is an essentializing commodification to evolve the society objectively and the men's stance towards it (1971: 86). The dominion and servitude relationship gives power to the production process (Lukacs, 1971: 86), estranging the worker's soul. "This is the reason," Lukacs mentions, "why the products of labor become commodities, social things whose qualities are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the sense" (1971: 86). The dehumanized workers use the commodities objectively for their benefits, and in this process, they subjectively mold the objective processes. The human labor incorporated in the commodified human being makes him an inhuman or reified producer (Lukacs, 1971: 87). The recognition of equality between the exchanged products or commodities also needs to be rationalized with specialization. Lukacs writes,

Reification requires that a society should learn to satisfy all its needs in terms of commodity exchange. The separation of the producer from his means of production, the dissolution and destruction of all 'natural' production units, etc., and all the social and economic conditions necessary for the emergence of modern Capitalism tend to

replace 'natural' relations which exhibit human relations more plainly by rationally reified relations (1971: 91).

The reified products appear in this nexus of social relations, as the members of the specific specie. The "natural laws" of the capitalistic world cover the whole set up of the commodified world, "covering every manifestation of life" (Lukacs, 1971: 92).

Lukacs expounds on the worker's fate as the process of self-objectification. This transformation of a human being into a machine, with use-value, "functions into a commodity reveals in all its starkness the dehumanized and dehumanizing function of the commodity relation" (1971: 92). The modern world has designed such ubiquitous laws of commodification that the prevalence of economy requires the non-human treatment towards the subjective things or relations. Such a reified mindset does not try to transcend human beings' materialistic analysis as commodified in the ontological sphere of historical existence. Sinking deeply into the economic structure is its fate (Lukacs, 1971: 92). Lukacs interprets as "the meaningless form of capital, the perversion and objectification of production relations in their highest degree, the interest-bearing form, the simple form of capital, in which it antecedes its own process of reproduction" (1971: 94).

Because of their awares of the destructive consequences of reification, many thinkers limit themselves to the objectively derivative forms (Lukacs, 1971: 94) as a timeless human relations (Lukacs, 1971: 95), those who become unable to comprehend their humanity. Lukacs declares such crippled humanity as abnormality similar to the "mindless' work of the bureaucracy's lower echelons" (1971: 95). The workers' labor resembles a machine, even surpassing sterility and uniformity, and predicting the violation of human beings' humanity and the supremacy of dehumanized or mechanized systems. The worker metamorphoses into a "thing". Reification, in the capitalistic society, celebrates the passive treatment of other human beings towards the worker who is reified. Their qualities, morals, labor, intelligence, and products are all valuable commodities bartered in the capitalist economic system. "And there is no natural form in which human relations can be cast, no way in which man can bring his physical and psychic 'qualities' into play without their being subjected increasingly to this reifying process (Lukacs, 1971: 100).

### **Data Analysis**

The *Reification model* is used to analyze *The Plague* (1948) by questioning the commodification process in the capitalistic world where simple viruses spread and become powerful enough to experience their existence as a challenge for humanity and humanness. Such growth of nasty viruses and plagues lead to the deaths of individuals and become chaotic. According to Shah, the subjected workers have no control and power over their products and labor, alienating them from their souls, work environment, family, and nature (Callinicos, 2004). Conceptualizing Lukacs, while framing Camus' characters in the commodification process, Rieux and Cottard get affected by reification in 1918's epidemic and present humanity's wretchedness devaluation having an inverse proportional relation with the power and magnitude of worker's production. Nevertheless, the product becomes powerful, but the worker's labor becomes powerless. This imbalance creates a direct relation of the worker with his estrangement, wherein, despite possessing the power of creation of

commodities, the worker suffers more as he creates more in the capitalistic society. Camus (1948) discusses the plight of the inhabitants in the commodified world while incorporating the disease as the revelation project of Capitalism's economic evils. Marx and Engels write, "the necessary result of competition is the accumulation of capital in a few hands, and thus the restoration of monopoly in a more terrible form" (1988: 69). Such accumulation creates a difference between capitalist and land-rentier, and "the whole of society must fall apart into the two classes the property owners and the property-less workers" (Marx & Engels, 1988: 69), leading to the transference of disease and suffering from upper echelons to lower class.

The reified worker produces medicines only to commodify the disease. Denial of the self, while commodifying the product, mortifies his body and ruins his mental capabilities. Consequences of such detachment and estrangement endorse forced labor in which the worker sacrifices his will and performs mundane tasks, as Marx and Engels write, "animal functions-eating, drinking, procreating, or at most in his dwelling and dressing-up, etc.; and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal" (1988: 24). The medicines are available in the market but only for the economically stable bourgeoisie class and not for the sufferers from the proletariat class. When the product is commodified, it no longer belongs to the worker and hence, takes all his power from him, making someone else, or any bourgeoisie, its master (Marx & Engels, 1988: 79). The dominion of the bourgeoisie or the ruling class then decides the fate of the other sufferers.

Bonk (2010) writes, "Camus quarantines the inhabitants of Oran in a struggle against a bubonic-like epidemic. Within this microcosm, Camus juxtaposes medicine against government and religion in his quest to find medical meaning in an absurd world" (2010: 1). Marx description of the phenomenon as, "the appropriation of the object appear as estrangement", which leads to his reification "under the dominion of his product, capital" (Marx & Engels, 1988: 71). In *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), Camus explains the dilemma and struggle for meaning after birth and the confrontation of "human need and the unreasonable silence of the world" (Bonk, 2010: 4). Bonk further enunciates, "In this context, Camus' absurdism —human struggle when trapped between contradictory inevitabilities— coalesces within an estranged society impotent against an almost anthropomorphized infection fought by Dr. Bernard Rieux" (2010: 4). He burdens Oran's inhabitants for their estrangement, credits the government's pandemic strategies, and forgets the patients' quest of medicines and the bourgeoisie's normlessness. In antagonism to his assertion, the dehumanized laborers are more concerned with capital and less with proletariat class' life-value,

Once unburdened by responsibility, the prefect's government fully implements the required measures of quarantine: all town gates close; ships are turned away from the harbor; rail service halts; those outside the town are barred from reunion with loved ones caught within the administrative blockade. These manifestations of quarantine herald the patient's isolation in Camus' "modern" world and its scientific advancements. Ironically, it is now Oran's inhabitants who deny the reality of the plague (Bonk, 2010: 5).

Oran's mechanized inhabitants are the heirs of humanity. Undeservedly, their humanity has been snatched from them by the economic nexus, tightening its noose around the workers'



necks. Camus' character "Tarrou seemed to have been quite fascinated by the commercial character of the town, whose aspects, activities, and even pleasures all seemed to be dictated by considerations of business" (Camus, 1948: 24). He takes notes of the town's life in his diary, along with the sullen attitude of the government, who waits for the prefect's orders instead of taking serious and quick actions (Camus, 1948: 28). "There was demand for drastic measures" (Camus, 1948: 16), which is neglected retroactively to be considered later. Then "a campaign against the local authorities" (Camus, 1948: 26) started. Seemingly, Bonk's exploration of Camus' disposition in narrating Oran's citizens' hypocrisy and medical technicians' problems despite all technical advances (Bonk, 2010: 10) hint towards the failure of state apparatuses. Camus describes Oran as a "completely modern" and historical town as a metaphor for how a dehumanized society "isolates patients trusting in them for altruistic care" (Bonk, 2010: 14) who themselves are reified. But, the proletariat class' sufferings are decisively ignored by Camus. Lukács, while criticizing Kafka, Camus and other modernist writers, hold a stern look towards the modernity and immutability of objective actuality, powerlessness, and meaninglessness of human actions (Macdonald, 2018: 4).

Lukács here attempts to tie Kafka's specific form of estrangement to the problem of social stagnation and resignation, and from there to a rejection of socialism and a better future for humanity: The refusal of socialism as a perspective, whether explicit or taken for granted, . . . means that a door has been slammed shut, a curtain has dropped before the future, which in turn means that the state of the world—consisting of chaos and anxiety—becomes perennial, eternally predetermined for the subject (Macdonald, 2018: 4).

This evolution merely strives for the "survival of the fittest" mantra in Camus' absurd world, where he focuses on blood-guilty (Rossi, 1958: 403). Camus' crimes always encompass murders and mass killings (Rossi, 1958: 403). Nevertheless, these mass killings are merely the end of use-less products or impair machines that cannot be repaired. Such timeless and universality of works also depict more prominent inoculation and profusion of Capitalism within society's nerves in the doze of commodified medicines.

Jonathan Gil Harris' views about epidemics and corporeal economic images like "Asian Flu" are quite similar to Covid-19, which has also emerged from the Chinese city Wuhan, which presents the similarity. He writes, "The tigers were thus transmuted into morbid chickens, threatening to infect the economies of the West" (Harris, 2004: 1). His exploration of transnational functioning of trade and mercantile matters, especially for hegemonizing that particular nation or country by using viruses and pandemics, "has conversely shown how 'germs:' together with 'guns and steel;' were the West's primary weapons of economic as well as cultural conquest (Harris, 2004: 18). Michel Foucault deciphers such disorderly nature of pandemics in the preface to *The Order of Things*, "disease is at the same time disorder-the existence of a perilous otherness within the human body, at the very heart of life-and a natural phenomenon with its constants, resemblances, and types" (Foucault, 2002) (Harris, 2004: 20). Ben Jonson's play *Volpone or the Fox* (1606) epitomizes the universal gluttony for "stream of gifts from a swarm of legacy hunters" wait for his demise in "hope to be named his heir and to inherit his fortune" (Harris, 2004: 108). However, *Volpone* is the master of all in commodifying the candidates' greed (Harris, 2004:

108). Harris discusses it as transference and ontological conception of disease and mercantile transnational economic use. The divine John King, who in 1594, attributed the "infection of the plague" to the "air" (Harris, 2004: 113), provides the example of transference of contagion from one region to another through air and people, either it be done deliberately or incidentally. It was declared as the consequence of "sin" committed by "the special prerogative of foreign nations" (Harris, 2004: 114).

Camus enunciates the inhabitants' helplessness, carelessness, and mechanized lives (Camus, 1948: 3). In the Covid-19 pandemic, Oran has been exemplified as the reflector of today's virus and the same survival strategies of living "behind closed shutters" (Camus, 1948: 3). Oran, as a completely modern town, is materialized by tenders and traders (Camus, 1948: 4), "a town without intimation" (Camus, 1948: 4). Camus' prophesies of the coming ages where "a dying man, trapped behind hundreds of walls all sizzling with heat" while the rest of the public enjoying at cafes (Camus, 1948: 5) are the picturesque views of not only Oran but 2020's the USA, Italy, Brazil and China. The ontology of the coming events i.e., the truth and the existence of human beings, poses a question for the authorities whether living beings are liable to be exchangeable with material things. Camus writes, "...there are thousands of eyewitnesses who can appraise in their hearts the truth" (Camus, 1948: 6). In 2020, the excessive use of disinfectants and sanitizers has increased their use-value and production cost, which has become expensive. The laborers have reified themselves as commodities to be fetishized by the capitalistic government amidst the excessive use of their products for sterilization. In the United States of America, citizens have bought Clorox wipes "\$44.25, plus \$14.59 shipping" and toilet papers with a 10% increase in price while masks were sold with fivefold increased price (Guynn & Tyko, 2020). The same increased price is reported in Hong Kong, also (Hui, 2020). While in Pakistan, the already devastated health facilities have become nearly extinct during the Covid-19 pandemic and lock-down imposed by the state, which is also discussed in the economic survey of Pakistan (Health and Nutrition, 2020). Similarly, illegal business and bartering of the oxygen cylinders and blood plasma of recovered patients to the Covid-19 patients is also noticed because of the surge in demand for blood plasma due to fear of death (Petersen & Baloch, 2020), hand sanitizers, and necessary medicines' need also exceeded the limit (C-19 Outbreak in Pak, 2020). The increase in price, as mentioned in the newspaper articles, was up to 25%. The comparison of the past and the present portrays the decadence and epiphany of moral and material death.

The "queer" happening in the town; Reux's less information about the matter (Camus, 1948: 10); Rambert's confinement of truth as muted despite being a journalist (Camus, 1948: 11), "It certainly is worth the trouble" (Camus, 1948: 14). The piles of dead rats and bloodstains everywhere became the source of spreading the disease, creating chaos (Camus, 1948: 15). Such transformation of calmness into chaos brought commotion in 2020's economy. In April 25, the burning of rats can be taken as the metaphorical representation of the thrown off corpses of dead humans in 2020's March and April in the USA and Italy (Feuer & Rashbaum, 2020), which, in Camus' words, is a "...jolt to the public nerves" (Camus, 1948: 15) and realization of Camus' prediction of future events in the capitalistic society.

Camus insinuates the fearful implications of plague, "People out at night would often feel underfoot the squelchy roundness of a still-warm body. It was as if the earth on which



our houses stood were being purged of its secreted humors, thrusting up to the surface the abscesses and pus-clots that had been forming in its entrails” (1948: 15). The squalid environment and the setting depicts human beings’ focus on economic gains and nonchalance towards rotten and wretched humanity. Dr. Rieux’s patient, whom he treats for Asthma, chuckles and says, "They are coming out, they are coming out," with senile glee" (Camus, 1948: 15). However, since the workers themselves attract the disease and cannot work while keeping social distancing, it has brought the economic depression and loss of use-value, and unemployment.

At the time of the plague, the question of theism and agnosticism opens the debate for the reified world where human beings as fetishized commodities make their religious gods. During the Covid- 19 pandemic, Science has doubted religion, whereas history's political agenda of spreading news on social and electronic media as hoaxes, conspiracy theories, and myths is discredited Rafi a dialogic content analysis (Rafi, 2020). Dehumanized workers, in *The Plague* (1948), pray to god in challenging times or on death beds, with the help of Paneloux- the Priest, who himself is indifferent to religion (Camus, 1948: 16). Pain in the patients’ body is an abstract idea that is not materialized, hence unnoticed. Thus, such abstraction also leads to agnostic or gnostic reification of the workers. Human beings have denounced religion and have consumed themselves in the process of reification. Resultantly, they have forgotten the culture of humanity and compassion.

The scourge of disease, evident from Michel’s death and the “wholesale deaths of rats” (Camus, 1948: 21), enliven the traders and businessmen's golden time. They think of making money by selling the medicines and food at inflated rates. Camus’ enunciates, “...disasters always come out of the blue” (Camus, 1948: 25). The juxtaposing of human cries and machine-saw noise, where the factory engine producing products for material use, sounds similar to the materialistic value of cries (Camus, 1948: 37-8). The uselessness of the dying citizens brings forth the bourgeoisie’s lottery in the form of money obtained normlessly by increasing the price of commodities. Rieux consumes his use-value to treat the plague-stricken patients, like a machine. “Now, we are like everybody else” (Camus, 1948: 27). Camus’ character Grand “escapes in such cases” (Camus, 1948: 40), creating his persona as unreliable and materialistic as a “mystery man” (1948: 40). Avoiding the compassionate words, “your kindness”, "gratitude", and even "solicit", "which, to his thinking, were incompatible with his dignity" (Camus, 1948: 42), provide the evidence of his existence incarnated as a dehumanized commodity. His incapability of handling discourses (Camus, 1948: 43), i.e. the writing disorder Grand suffers from, provides him a chance to commodify his writing in isolation.

The materialistic interpellations of the capitalistic concept of disease and the resultant symptoms in patients brought the shortage of commodities vis-a-vis workers and their use-value. Such conversion of breathing human beings into the capitalistic product reifies the existence of human beings. The policy of “wait-and-see” (Camus, 1948: 45) poses the question of time taken by the capitalistic authorities to measure the extent and standard of plague, which spreads the disease and increase the number of victims. Rieux' remark, "one could not always be alone" (Camus, 1948: 53) presents the alienated existence of dehumanized workers who in the class system and Capitalism suffer because of the fissure which needs to be mended to avoid existential crisis at the time of the pandemic. Dr. Rieux

comments on the extreme-level social distancing, "It's a mistake staying indoors too much" (Camus, 1948: 53), debunking the myth of avoiding going outside for social distancing and paradoxically epitomizes Capitalism amidst chaos.

All their breaths, blood, and plasma are transformed into use-value and after the last drop spilled for Capitalism, they are all dead. Camus discusses the humanistic and empathetic aspect with such a profound strategy that capitalistic fissures open up instantly, and the compassionate human beings' absence comes to the forefront, which proves Marxist ideology's truth value. Mariana Mazzucato says, "Capitalism is facing at least three major crises. A pandemic-induced health crisis has rapidly ignited an economic crisis with yet unknown consequences for financial stability, and all of this is playing out against the backdrop of a climate crisis that cannot be addressed by "business as usual" (2020).

Contrary to Mazzucato, Michael Robin proposes Capitalism as the solution for Covid-19's capitalistic losses by presenting the communist Wuhan's condition and compares it with capitalist Taiwan's free market and least the covid-19 patients (Rubin, 2020). In 2020's Covid 19, there are so many Rieux who, as reified doctors, exchange their time and care with capital to culturally adjust themselves in the mortal situation where people die in multiple numbers daily. Rieux knows his limitations as a mortal being. Whereas, there are dehumanized workers who find a chance in such pandemics to earn more capital gormlessly. Camus writes, "The truth was that Cottard, who had been beginning to live above his means, was now involved in smuggling ventures concerned with rationed goods. Selling contraband cigarettes and inferior liquor at steadily rising prices, he was on the way to building up a small fortune" (1948: 129).

There are recovered patients in many poverty-stricken countries who commodify their blood plasma as an economic gain in 2020. The New York Times reporter Knvul Sheikh has reported the shortage of essential life drugs in America during the Covid-19 pandemic (Sheikh, 2020). Sheikh has revealed the shortage of sedatives, antiviral, antibacterial, and airway opening drugs. The capitalistic economy is under constant threat of extinction because of a shortage of workers and commodities. Whereas, the workers have to fight hard to continue the struggle of life. The need for medicines, drugs, and masks has been increased many folds that need to meet the supply. Camus mentions, "Thus, the traffic thinned out progressively until hardly any private cars were on the roads; luxury shops closed overnight, and others began to put up "Sold Out" notices, while crowds of buyers stood waiting at their doors" (Camus, 1948: 72). Cottard tells Rieux about a man who stores "several dozen cans of meat under his bed" (Camus, 1948: 72) to sell with more profit, but he dies, and the product he thinks to commodify conversely reifies him. Capitalism fetishizes his fate, and morbidity seizes his productive time, henceforth, causing his death. Camus describes social isolation or "quarantine" (Camus, 1948: 77) as the only possible solution to curb the disease and stop it despite sheer helplessness, debunking Robin's justification of Capitalism in 2020.

"The language of reason and not of the heart" (Camus, 1948: 79) perpetuates the materialistic ideology interpellated in the commodified version of heartless humans, whereby stopping the killing of productive human beings and saving as much as one can. During such pandemics, existence is preferred over abstract ideas of love and desire to avoid human loss. Rationality needs to be supported for the survival of the being as private welfare is the collective public welfare (Camus, 1948: 80), and it must not be abandoned to put other

people's lives at stake. "Yes, an element of abstraction, of a divorce from reality, entered into such calamities" (Camus, 1948: 81). Pope Francis wrote, "The battle against hunger and malnutrition will not end as long as the logic of the market prevails" (Rubin, 2020). The dilemma of "free market", as portrayed by Camus, is a threat to the survival of many patients and hungry human beings. Camus mentions, "We're short of equipment. In all the armies of the world, a shortage of equipment is usually compensated for by man-power. But, we're short of man-power, too" (Camus, 1948: 137). Such existential angst and threat to the being questions the reified capitalistic world for examination.

## Conclusion

Hence, the novel *The Plague* (1948), written about the plague of 1918, relates to 2020's Covid-19 pandemic and the minute details about it as timeless and universal retroactive and premonitory connection with the future. Curfew was imposed with all whittled down formalities (Camus, 1948: 155), but, due to more deaths and fewer coffins, winding sheets, and the space in the cemetery, proper funeral ritual was totally abandoned, and the relatives were halted at the cemetery doors. The same historical culture is propelled to this capitalistic time to highlight the materialistic approaches of people. Camus even paralleled the burial process similar to the dog's burial, except paper- signing ritual (Camus, 1948: 159). April to August and then to January was this epidemic continued and tossed all its fears and threats. Camus writes, "the habit of despair is worse than despair itself" (Camus, 1948: 164), but the capitalistic world even commodifies the despair as a material thing with exchange value. Therefore, the overall reification during a pandemic poses a threat to humanity and the existence of human beings. The dehumanization persists and forces us to think about the morality and the extent of reification in our beings.

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